

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY DOHA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY SANA
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TUNIS
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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LONDON FOR KINSOLVING, OTHER ADDRESSES FOR AMBASSADORS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: EG, IS, PINR

SUBJECT: INTSUM 438 - NOVEMBER 8, 1977

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1. SYRIA. THE CURRENT INTERFACTIONAL FEUDING IN SYRIA APPEARS TO INVOLVE ELEMENTS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL RIVALRY BETWEEN RIFAT ASSAD'S DEFENSE COMPANIES AND THE REGULAR MILITARY. RIFAT'S "PRAETORIAN GUARD," AS YOU ARE AWARE, HAS THE BASIC MISSION OF ACTING AS A BUFFER BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND AMBITIOUS MILITARY OFFICERS WHO MIGHT CONTEMPLATE A MOVE AGAINST THE REGIME.

2. MANY REGULAR OFFICERS OPPOSE RIFAT BECAUSE THEY VIEW HIM AS THE SYMBOL OF THE REGIME'S CORRUPTION. THEIR

ANTIPATHY TOWARD HIM, HOWEVER, ALSO REFLECTS OTHER, MORE TANGIBLE FACTORS:

--THE DEFENSE COMPANIES HAVE FIRST CALL ON NEW MILITARY EQUIPMENT.

--RIFAT'S TROOPS ARE CONSIDERED ELITE COMMANDO UNITS AND CONSEQUENTLY RECEIVE SPECIAL BONUSES.

--HIS FORCES RING DAMASCUS, A DEPLOYMENT THAT ALLOWS HIS TROOPS TO LIVE AT HOME WITH THEIR FAMILIES AND GENERALLY EXEMPTS THEM FROM SERVICE ON THE GOLAN FRONT OR THE IRAQI BORDER.

--THE DEFENSE COMPANIES ARE NOT RESPONSIVE TO GENERAL STAFF ORDERS AND ARE WIDELY BELIEVED IN SYRIA TO ACT AS A LAW UNTO THEMSELVES.

3. DESPITE THESE NEGATIVE FACTORS, HOWEVER, THIS ARRANGEMENT APPARENTLY SUITS BOTH RIFAT AND THE PRESIDENT. IT IS CLEAR THAT ASSAD BELIEVES THAT HIS SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CHECKS AND BALANCES IS EFFICIENT ENOUGH TO FORESTALL A COUP. NEVERTHELESS, THE RESURGENCE OF TEN-SECRET

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SIONS BETWEEN REGULAR ARMY FACTIONS- AND HIS BROTHER DEFENSE COMPANIES WILL OBLIGE THE PRESIDENT TO PAY EVEN CLOSER ATTENTION TO THE ATTITUDES OF REGULAR MILITARY OFFICERS TOWARD HIS POLICIES. IN THIS VEIN, ASSAD'S AWARENESS OF DISAFFECTION AMONG MIDDLE AND LOWER-GRADE OFFICERS IN PART ACCOUNTED FOR HIS INITIAL STRESS ON PURSUING THE ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN.

4. NOW, ARMY OFFICERS ARE APPARENTLY SHIFTING THEIR DISPLEASURE TO ASSAD'S GENEVA POLICY. OUR DEFENSE ATTACHE IN DAMASCUS LEARNED FROM A RELIABLE SOURCE THAT YOUNGER ARMY OFFICERS WERE APPREHENSIVE ABOUT THE "SOFT LINE" TAKEN BY THE REGIME TOWARD THE PEACE PROCESS. ACCORDING TO THE SOURCE, "LOUD PROTESTS" WERE BEING CONVEYED TO ASSAD, LARGELY FROM THE ARMY, THROUGH THE BAATH PARTY NETWORK. THE SOURCE ASSERTED THAT THE MAJORITY OF OFFICERS FEEL THAT THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP HAS COMPROMISED ITSELF BY OFFERING TOO MANY CONCESSIONS IN THE GENEVA PRELIMINARIES.

5. MILITARY DISGRUNTLEMENT ALSO IS BEING EXPRESSED IN SYRIA'S PARLIAMENT. THE SOURCE CONTINUED THAT KHADDAM'S RECENT SPEECH IN THIS FORUM OUTLINING SYRIA'S ACHIEVEMENTS TOWARD RECONVENING GENEVA RECEIVED A STRONGLY NEGATIVE REACTION FROM THE MILITARY DEPUTIES PRESENT.

6. THIS INFORMATION SUGGESTS TO US THAT CRITICS OF ASSAD'S "SOFT LINE," WHO HAVE INSTITUTIONAL ACCESS TO THE BAATH PARTY AND THE PARLIAMENT, WILL BE ABLE TO GENERATE A SERIOUS DEBATE ON THE PEACE PROCESS IF

THEIR CONCERNS ARE NOT ASSUAGED. WHILE RIFAT'S FORCES ARE CONCERNED WITH DEFENDING THE REGIME, REGULAR MILITARY OFFICERS FEEL A BROADER RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD THE SECURITY OF THE COUNTRY. IN THE PRESENT CIRCUM-
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STANCES, THEREFORE, THE PRESIDENT MAY HAVE TO PAY SOME ATTENTION TO THE STRONGLY HELD VIEWS OF THE REGULAR OFFICERS IF HE INTENDS TO PRESERVE HIS INTRICATE SYSTEM OF COUNTERVAILING POWERS. CONSEQUENTLY, HIS MANEUVERABILITY IN THE PEACE PROCESS ULTIMATELY MAY DIMINISH EVEN MORE. (SECRET/NOFORN)

7. ISRAEL. THE HISTRADUT MONDAY CALLED A HALT TO ITS CAMPAIGN OF STRIKES AND PROTEST ACTIONS AGAINST THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT'S NEW ECONOMIC POLICY. IT OPENED A CONVENTION TO DECIDE WHAT STEPS TO TAKE NEXT; A HISTADRUT SPOKESMAN SAID THE ORGANIZATION IS WAITING TO DETERMINE HOW MUCH PRICES RISE IN NOVEMBER BEFORE DECIDING ON THE AMOUNT OF COMPENSATION TO DEMAND FROM THE GOVERNMENT.

8. RADIO ISRAEL BROADCAST THAT THE AGRICULTURE MINISTRY WAS PREPARING TO RECOGNIZE THE GUSH EMUNIM AS A LEGITIMATE SETTLEMENT MOVEMENT. WHEN IMPLEMENTED, THE DECISION WILL PERMIT THE GUSH TO OBTAIN BANK CREDITS AND OFFICIAL FUNDING.

9. HAARETZ REPORTER YEHUDA LITANI RECENTLY TOLD EMBASSY TEL AVIV THAT HIS SOURCES HAVE SAID SOME GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ARE DISCUSSING THE IDEA OF ESTABLISHING 20-25 WEST BANK SETTLEMENTS SIMULTANEOUSLY. SUCH A MOVE WOULD BE MADE AS AN "ANSWER" TO THE ARABS IF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE IS NOT CONVENED OR IF, UPON CONVENING, IF QUICKLY FAILS. LITANI STRESSED THAT THIS IS CURRENTLY JUST AN IDEA, NOT A PLAN. THE EMBASSY COMMENTED THAT ESTABLISHING SUCH A LARGE NUMBER OF SETTLEMENTS AT ONE TIME WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT FROM THE STANDPOINTS OF MANPOWER, MONEY, AND INTERNATIONAL
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REACTION.

10. EMBASSY TEL AVIV REPORTED THAT A NUMBER OF RUMORS HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING IN ISRAEL THAT BEGIN MAY RESIGN

NEXT SPRING AND SUCCEED PRESIDENT KATZIR. ACCORDING TO SPECULATION, EGIN'S DECISION WOULD DEPEND UPON HIS HEALTH AND HIS ABILITY POSSIBLY TO POINT TO HIS ACHIEVEMENT IN RECONVENING GENEVA. A WELL-INFORMED

ISRAELI JOURNALIST TOLD THE EMBASSY THAT BEGIN IS INDEED SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING THIS STEP.

11. DAYAN STATED SUNDAY THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAS ALWAYS BEEN ISRAEL'S FRIEND, AND THUS ISRAEL "WILL NOT ABANDON SOUTH AFRICA BECAUSE OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S POSITION," ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS. MONDAY, HOWEVER, AN ISRAELI FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL CLARIFIED DAYAN'S REMARKS, SAYING THAT ISRAEL WOULD ADHERE TO A UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION CALLING FOR AN ARMS EMBARGO AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA.

12. EGYPT. EMBASSY CAIRO REPORTED THAT, ACCORDING TO AL-AHRAM, THE EGYPTIAN CABINET HAS DECIDED TO REDUCE EGYPTIAN LOAN REPAYMENT TO THE SOVIETS ON COMMERCIAL ACCOUNTS FROM 70 MILLION POUNDS STERLING TO 10 MILLION POUNDS STERLING. THE EMBASSY COMMENTED THAT THE ONLY WAY FOR EGYPT TO REDUCE SUCH PAYMENTS IS TO REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF ITS EXPORTS TO THE USSR. THEREFORE, THIS DECISION MAY PRESAGE CUTS IN EGYPTIAN EXPORTS TO THE SOVIET UNION UNDER THE 1978 TRADE PROTOCOL. ACCORDING TO AL-GUMHURRIYAH, EGYPT IS CONSIDERING SIMILAR ACTION TOWARD CZECHOSLOVAKIA.

13. IN A CONVERSATION WITH AN EMBASSY CAIRO OFFICER, PROMINENT EGYPTIAN LEFTIST ISMAIL ABDALLAH MADE THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS ON THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE:

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--THE MIDEAST PROBLEM WILL NOT BE RESOLVED SOON;

--THERE IS INSUFFICIENT PRESSURE ON ISRAEL BOTH INTERNALLY AND FROM ABROAD TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE.

--THE PRESENT OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OFFER ISRAEL A PHYSICAL SECURITY WHICH NO ISRAELI REGIME WILL WILLINGLY GIVE UP.

--HE EXPECTS ISRAEL TO LAUNCH ANOTHER WAR SOON, A VIEW HE CLAIMED WAS ALSO SHARED BY GAMASY.

EMBASSY CAIRO NOTED THAT ABDALLAH'S VIEWS REPRESENT THE OPINIONS OF A BROAD CROSS SECTION OF EGYPTIAN INTELLECTUALS. (CONFIDENTIAL)

14. ARAB-ISRAELI. THE FLURRY OF INTER-ARAB CONSULTATIONS--APPARENTLY AIMED AT ESTABLISHING SOME ARAB

COORDINATION ON THE US WORKING PAPER AND THE ARAB STANCE TOWARD KEY PROCEDURAL ISSUES INVOLVED IN RECONVENING THE GENEVA CONFERENCE--CONTINUED NOVEMBER 7. SAUDI FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD TRAVELED TO DAMASCUS, FOLLOWED SHORTLY THEREAFTER BY KING HUSSEIN WHO ARRIVED UNEXPECTEDLY FROM CAIRO. MEANWHILE, ARAFAT STOPPED IN CAIRO MONDAY ON HIS CURRENT TOUR OF ARAB CAPITALS, HAVING COME FROM DAMASCUS. REGARDING HUSSEIN'S STOPOVER IN CAIRO, CAIRO MENA QUOTED SADAT AS SAYING THAT HE AND THE KING HAD DISCUSSED THE ISSUE OF PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION AT GENEVA AND THE QUESTION OF A POSSIBLE ARAB SUMMIT. (UNCLASSIFIED)

15. PALESTINIANS. SOVIET FOREIGN MINISTER GROMYKO
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MET WITH PLO POLITICAL CHIEF QADDUMI LATE LAST WEEK, ACCORDING TO MOSCOW RADIO, AND REAFFIRMED SOVIET SUPPORT FOR THE PALESTINIANS. THE BROADCAST NOTED THAT THE SOVIET AND PLO LEADERS "MARKED A COINCIDENCE OF OPINIONS" ON BASIC ISSUES REGARDING A PEACE SETTLEMENT AND RECONVENING GENEVA AND THAT THE SOVIET UNION STANDS FOR EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF THE PLO IN THE CONFERENCE. QADDUMI, MEANWHILE, IN A MOSCOW SPEECH, STATED THAT SOVIET SUPPORT FOR THE PLO HAD "ALWAYS BEEN CLEAR-CUT AND EFFECTIVE," ACCORDING TO TASS. (UNCLASSIFIED)

16. LEBANON: INTENSE EXCHANGES OF ARTILLERY FIRE CONTINUED IN SOUTH LEBANON THE NIGHT OF NOVEMBER 6-7 IN THE WAKE OF THE ROCKET ATTACK ON THE ISRAELI TOWN OF NAHARIYAH. THREE MORE VOLLEYS OF KTAYUSHA ROCKETS FELL ON NAHARIYAH TUESDAY MORNING. ARTILLERY AND MORTAR DUELS WERE FOUGHT IN THE MARJAYOUN/KHIYAM/NABATIYAH AREA, AS WELL AS THE COASTAL REGION NEAR RAS NAQUORAH. THE IDF CONFIRMED PRESS REPORTS THAT ISRAELI ARTILLERY HAD ALSO PARTICIPATED IN THE COASTAL SHELLING. MEANWHILE, WEIZMAN REITERATED TO THE PRESS MONDAY THAT THE IDF WOULD TAKE "INTENSIVE AND QUICK" ACTION TO RESTORE CALM TO THE SOUTH IF CEASEFIRE VIOLATIONS CONTINUE. (UNCLASSIFIED) VANCE

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